

The text below is a composite of different emotions, thoughts, and actions that I have seen and experienced while working with survivors of human trafficking. It reflects the survivor struggles of both labor and sex trafficking, male & female, adult & child, foreign-born and domestic.

I am a person first and foremost, I may or may not be dealing with other forms of abuse or self-esteem issues. I have hopes and dreams, problems and faults. I reach out for help and someone says I don't fit their requirements, if I'd only stayed a little bit longer, been hurt a little more then maybe they could help me. I feel like I'm being judged to see if I'm worth your pity; am I pretty enough, am I fragile enough, am I thankful enough, do I make you feel protective and like a hero?

Caught in the sensationalism of the topic human trafficking, how can this have happened to me? I'm a victim! Am I a victim? How can I be a victim?! I ask myself, and others ask, how could I let this happen, when did I turn from being in control to being manipulated, exploited, trafficked? I carry a sense of shame, I struggle with suicidal thoughts, curled up on the bathroom floor vomiting into a public toilet. I have to release the pressure, anger, disgust, abandonment and fear so I hit myself or use alcohol or drugs. Don't tell anyone, or I'll tell them myself, I'll wear the victimhood that you say I have like a badge so that you can't judge me more than I've judged myself.

The world is your oyster, you can make yourself new, but where do you start and how do you see yourself? The world is a scary place where people pass by seeming normal and I feel so isolated. I'm raw and hurt when people say that they'll be there for me and they aren't or won't. That I'm too angry, too negative, why can't you understand why I feel this way, after all you've told me I'm a victim. When I start new, those around me who've given services to me and been there, they want me to make better choices, but I'm still me and I like foods that are bad for you, tell inappropriate jokes, and want to feel included and special, and I'm tired of fighting myself and other's opinions and just want to be happy.

I believed this person, a person I had a relationship with, a person who, yes, I had bad times with, but also good...a person that they tell me to call my trafficker. That person treated me so well, I thought that I was safe, but I knew something was wrong...it felt like a fog. It is so easy to break something in one minute, and so hard to rebuild. I was lost for a long time, but now it is time to wake up; crying and suicide can't help anything, only make people think I'm a loser. Give up? NO Way! I should thank myself, I am not a fake, I did not give up.

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March 31, 2015